

## New Locality Records of Birds in Arnhem Land and Southern Gulf of Carpentaria

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### Introduction

The geographic distribution of bird species in remote regions of Arnhem Land and the southern Gulf of Carpentaria coast is inadequately documented. The avifauna of these regions is described in general terms by the RAOU Atlas (Blakers *et al.* 1984) and in lists by Storr (1977, 1984). Although a great deal is now known about the birds of Kakadu National Park (Woinarski *et al.* 1989a,b; Braithwaite & Woinarski 1990), the almost total lack of ornithological exploration in adjacent Arnhem land has led to possibly exaggerated claims of the significance of the Park as a refuge for many species. Here we report a number of significant new locality records for 17 species, including four of the eight species classified as "notable" (rare or endangered) by Woinarski *et al.* (1989a).

New records were obtained during the course of several brief avifaunal surveys. Four localities in Arnhem Land (Mann R, Goomadeer R, East Alligator R and Deaf Adder Creek; Fig. 1) were visited by helicopter during a study of the White-throated Grasswren *Amytornis woodwardi* from 26 December 1987 to 3 January 1988 (Noske 1988). The Lagoon Creek Gorge locality in north-west Queensland was visited to study the Carpentarian Grasswren *A. dorotheae* discovered there in 1986, documented recently by McKean & Martin (1989). Observers responsible for each record (the authors plus David Stewart: Mullumbimby, NSW; John McKean, Keith Martin: Darwin) are identified by their initials. Species designated as "notable" by Woinarski *et al.* (1989a) are identified by an asterisk. Latitudes and longitudes of all localities mentioned in the list are given in Appendix 1.

### Annotated List of Species

#### RED GOSHAWK *Erythrorhynchus radiatus* \*

- Robinson R crossing near 'Greenbank', 1 female, 1.7.86, flying downstream (GH, DS).
- Mann R camp, 1 male, 27.12.87, pursuing unidentified bird (GH).

The first record shows that no gap in distribution exists in the southern Gulf region, as predicted by Blakers *et al.* (1984).

#### BUSH-HEN *Amaurornis olivaceus*

- Caranbirini Waterhole south-west of Borroloola, 1, 29.6.86, calling early morning (GH).
- Plum Tree Creek crossing, 1, 21-23.12.87, calling late at night or early morning (GH).

There seem to be no published records for the southern Gulf region (see Blakers *et al.* 1984), but there is a previous unpublished record at Caranbirini Waterhole

(G Chapman, *in litt.*, 25.5.86). Although not listed by Woinarski *et al.* (1989a), the Plum Tree Creek record represents the second for Kakadu NP Stage III (see McKean & Reed 1979).

### BANDED FRUIT-DOVE *Ptilinopus cinctus* \*

- Nabarlek, groups of 2-7, 11-20.4.79, in fig trees, north and west of mine site; disused nest located 5 m above ground in horizontal fork of small tree in closed forest (GH).
- Mann R camp, 1, 27.12.87, river gorge in *Ficus virens* (GH, RN).

The second record is at or near the eastern limit (see Blakers *et al.* 1984). Note that the limits described by Reader's Digest (1986) as 'between Oenpelli and Katherine' are excessively conservative.

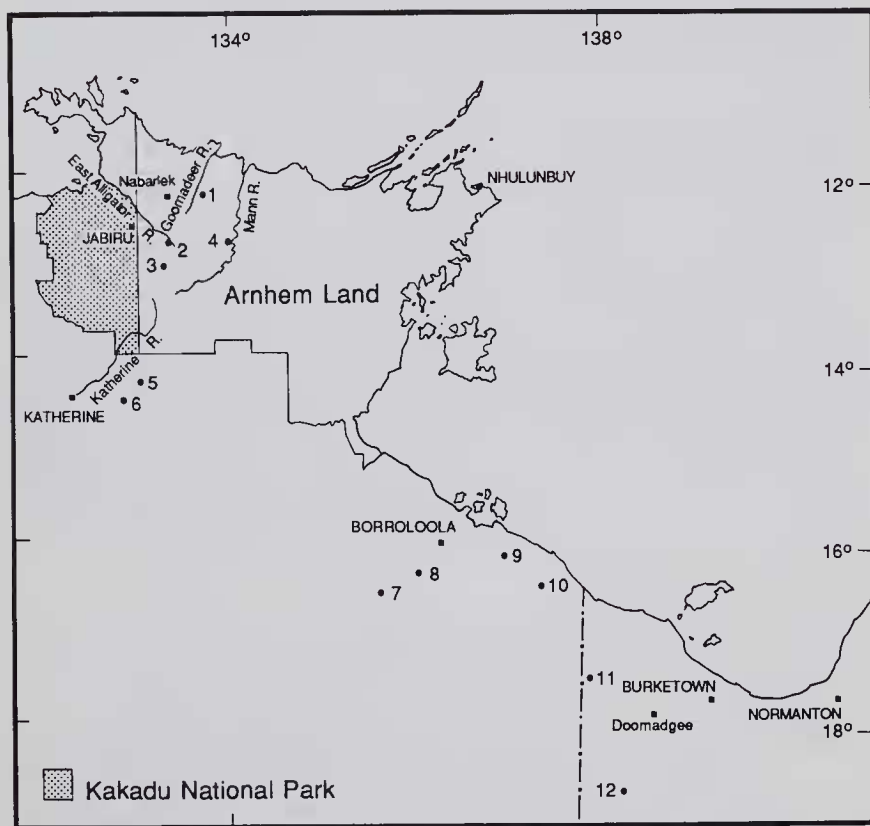


FIGURE 1 Map of the region covered in this paper. Numbers refer to the following localities: 1, Goomadeer R; 2, East Alligator R; 3, Deaf Adder Creek; 4, Mann R; 5, Diamond Creek; 6, Maranboy; 7, Cape Crawford; 8, Glyde R; 9, Robinson R; 10, Calvert R, 11, Lagoon Creek Gorge; 12, Lawn Hill National Park.

CHESTNUT-QUILLED ROCK-PIGEON *Petrophassa rufipennis*

- Nabarlek, singly or pairs, 11-20.4.79, encountered widely in sandstone areas; two occupied nests, each with two young, located in isolated outcrops, 6 m and 20 m above surrounding ground level, one in a horizontal crevice, the other in a pear-shaped cavity (GH).
- Diamond Creek via 'Eva Valley', 1, 19.12.87 (RN, GH).
- Mann, Goomadeer, East Alligator and Deaf Adder camps, singly or pairs, 26.12.87 - 3.1.88, encountered widely in sandstone areas (GH, RN).

Most of these records help define north-eastern and south-eastern limits; the record at Diamond Creek seems the first from this 1° block (see Blakers *et al.* 1984). Note that the limits described by Reader's Digest (1986) as 'vicinity of Oenpelli to Katherine Gorge' are excessively conservative.

RUFOUS OWL *Ninox rufa* \*

- Deaf Adder Creek camp, 1-2, 3.1.88, calling before dawn (GH).

This record helps define the distribution in the interior of Arnhem Land (see Blakers *et al.* 1984).

RAINBOW PITTA *Pitta iris*

- Mann R camp, 2 singly, 27.12.87, calling from closed forest in river gorge (RN, GH).

This record is probably at or near the eastern limit on the Arnhem Land escarpment; suitable habitat farther east diminishes rapidly (pers. obs.). Near the coast it occurs east to Groote Eylandt (Storr 1977; Blakers *et al.* 1984).

RED-CAPPED ROBIN *Petroica goodenovii*

- Harris Lake south of Burketown, 1 male, 3.7.86 (GH).

This record is the first in the coastal Gulf region; birds have been observed in autumn and winter north to the Barkly Tableland and Mt Isa district (see Storr 1977, 1984; Blakers *et al.* 1984).

CRESTED (NORTHERN) SHRIKE-TIT *Falcunculus frontatus whitei*

- Maranboy, 3 km along Eva Valley road, 1 male, 18.12.87, woodland dominated by *Eucalyptus latifolia*, *E. tectifica* and *Melaleuca viridiflora* (GH, RN)

There have been few recent records of this subspecies (see Blakers *et al.* 1984). The location is 24 km from Leach's Lagoon where the species was seen in 1970 (Rix 1970). The habitat of half-barked bloodwoods and boxes is somewhat different from the "stringybark forest" given in Storr (1977).

LITTLE SHRIKE-THRUSH *Colluricincla megarhyncha*

- Truganini Landing east of Burketown, 1, 3.7.86, mangroves along Albert River (GH).

This record supports the first in this region during the RAOU Field Atlas (see Blakers *et al.* 1984).

SANDSTONE SHRIKE-THRUSH *C. woodwardi*

- Lawn Hill National Park, several, 25.6.86 (GH, DS).
- Lagoon Creek Gorge, several, 27.6.86 (GH, DS).
- Calvert R, 1 km downstream from crossing near 'Pungalina', 1-2, 1.7.86 (GH, DS).
- Diamond Creek via 'Eva Valley', several, 18-19.12.87 (GH, RN).

- Mann, Goomadeer, East Alligator and Deaf Adder camps, numerous, 26.12.87-3.1.88 (GH, RN).

These records extend the known distribution by including four 1° blocks not recorded by the RAOU Field Atlas (see Blakers *et al.* 1984). The extreme extension to Lawn Hill National Park was reported briefly by McKean & Martin (1989) and referred to vaguely by Storr (1984).

#### SPINIFEX-BIRD *Eremiornis carteri*

- Lagoon Creek Gorge, 1-2, 27.6.86, spinifex in sandstone foothills (GH).
- Glyde R, junction with McArthur R, 5.86 (JM, KM)

These records are the first from the coastal Gulf region and represent a considerable extension northward from the Mt Isa district (see Blakers *et al.* 1984; Storr 1984).

#### WHITE-THROATED GRASSWREN *Amytornis woodwardi* \*

- Mann, Goomadeer, East Alligator and Deaf Adder camps, abundant in suitable habitat, 27.12.87 - 2.1.88 (RN, GH).

The Mann R record extends the known distribution of this species 100 km eastwards (from Nabarlek). The Field Atlas record for this 1° block (12°/134°) was based on second-hand information that was not confirmed (K. Bartram, pers. comm.). The designation of this species as "notable" by Woinarski *et al.* (1989a) is perplexing, considering Noske (1988) concluded that it was secure (see also Storr 1977; Schodde 1982).

#### HELMETED FRIARBIRD *Philemon buceroides*

- Lagoon Creek Gorge, 1, 27.6.86, chasing other honeyeaters (including Silver-crowned Friarbird *P argenticeps*) from a flowering *Grevillea pteridifolia* (DS, GH).
- Diamond Creek via 'Eva Valley', 1-2, 19.12.87 (GH, RN).
- Mann, Goomadeer, East Alligator and Deaf Adder camps, uncommon, 27.12.87-2.1.88 (GH, RN)

The first record is situated in the centre of an enormous gap in its documented distribution, between north-eastern Arnhem Land and northern Cape York Peninsula (see Blakers *et al.* 1984; Storr 1977, 1984). Despite its occurrence in sandstone habitat, a well developed casque on this bird indicates that *P. b. ammitophila* is not the subspecies concerned. The other records help better define the distribution of *ammitophila* in Arnhem Land, although all 1-degree blocks involved were recorded by the RAOU Field Atlas.

#### WHITE-LINED HONEYEATER *Meliphaga albilineata*

- Mann, Goomadeer, East Alligator and Deaf Adder camps, numerous, 26.12.87-3.1.88 (GH, RN).

These records (especially the first) extend the known distribution in the interior of Arnhem Land (see Blakers *et al.* 1984; Reader's Digest 1986).

#### ORANGE CHAT *Ephthianura aurifrons*

- Doomadgee, Nicholson R crossing, 1 pair, 26.6.86 (DS, GH).
- Borroloola, 3 km south-west, 3, 3 and 5, 29.6.86 (GH, DS). Also recorded here in 1985 (J. Whitaker per JM).
- Harris Lake south of Burketown, 2, 3.7.86 (GH).



**PLATE 2** *White-throated Grasswren in the hand, Kakadu National Park (R. Noske)*

These records indicate that winter visitors may occur regularly in the coastal Gulf region; the only previous record was at Burketown (see Blakers *et al.* 1984).

#### PAINTED FIRETAIL *Emblema picta*

- Lawn Hill National Park, numerous, 25-26.6.86 (GH, DS).
- Lagoon Creek Gorge, 4-5, 27.6.86 (GH, DS).

These records extend the documented distribution northward from the Mt Isa district (see Blakers *et al.* 1984; Storr 1984). There are also two unpublished records, of two birds at Katherine Gorge National Park in May 1985 (David Kowalick per JM), and an unknown number near Cape Crawford (90 km SW of Borroloola) in May 1986 (JM).

#### LITTLE CROW *Corvus bennetti*

- Borroloola, 20 km north on 'Bing Bong' road, several, 30.6.86 (GH, DS).

This is the first record from the coastal Gulf region of the Northern Territory (see Blakers *et al.* 1984; Storr 1977).

### Discussion

Recorded distributional limits were extended considerably for several species or populations associated closely with sandstone outcrops. Accordingly, perceptions that species such as the Banded Fruit-Dove, Chestnut-quilled Rock-Pigeon and White-throated Grasswren are confined to the escarpment region within Kakadu National Park are incorrect. Of the four species classified as "notable" by Woinarski *et al.* (1989a), two (Rufous Owl and White-throated Grasswren) appear to be neither rare nor endangered based on information published here and elsewhere.



Another (Banded Fruit-Dove) is apparently not as restricted as previously thought, and also occurs in the Lesser Sunda Islands. Clearly further exploration of Arnhem Land is necessary before the distribution and status of the birds of this region can be accurately assessed.

### Acknowledgements

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PLATE 3 *Helmeted Friarbird, Darwin (R. Noske)*

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**APPENDIX 1** Latitudes and longitudes of localities mentioned in the text, listed alphabetically.

- Borrooloola, 3 km south-west (16° 05'S, 136° 17'E)
- Borrooloola, 20 km north on 'Bing Bong' road (15° 55'S, 136° 19'E)
- Calvert R, 1 km downstream from crossing near 'Pungalina' (16° 31'S, 137° 32'E)
- Cape Crawford (16° 39'S, 135° 47'E)
- Caranbirini Waterhole south-west of Borrooloola (16° 26'S, 136° 04'E)
- Deaf Adder Creek (13° 07'S, 133° 16'E)
- Diamond Creek via 'Eva Valley' (14° 14'S, 133° 04'E)
- Doomadgee, Nicholson R crossing (17° 58'S, 138° 51'E)
- East Alligator River (12° 49'S, 133° 19'E)
- Goomadeer River (12° 17'S, 133° 40'E)
- Harris Lake south of Burketown (17° 49'S, 133° 33'E)
- Glyde R, junction with McArthur R (16° 25'S, 136° 08'E)
- Lagoon Creek Gorge (17° 32'S, 138° 02'E)
- Lawn Hill National Park (18° 44'S, 138° 28'E)
- Mann River (12° 47'S, 134° 04'E)
- Maranboy, 3 km along "Eva Valley" road (14° 30'S, 132° 48'E)
- Nabarlek (12° 19'S, 133° 19'E)
- Plum Tree Creek crossing (13° 31'S, 132° 27'E)
- Robinson R crossing near 'Greenbank' (16° 16'S, 137° 05'E)
- Truganini Landing east of Burketown (17° 45'S, 139° 35'E)